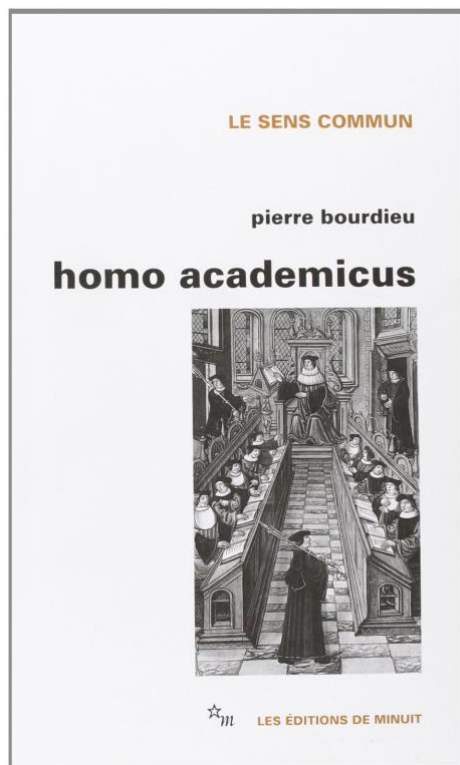


Irfan Ajvazi

BOURDIEU'S HOMO ACADEMICUS

Tesla Academy of Sciences



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Bourdieu argues that political inclination is dependent upon one's position in the academic field, and not vice versa. Distinguishing between three hierarchically arranged fields of power, he places the academic field in a middling position between the political and social fields. He posits a hierarchy of the faculties, in which those at the top are closer to political power. Bourdieu supports his argument using empirical data gathered through publicly available sources, presented in tabular form.

University professors, Bourdieu argues, are subordinate in the field of power to managers of industry and business, but are nonetheless "holders of an institutionalized form of cultural capital," and therefore culturally dominant with respect to writers and artists (36). These academics, especially those at the top of the social hierarchy, present higher percentages of "indices of social integration and respectability" (36-37).

According to Bourdieu, two antagonistic principles of hierarchization are at play in the university field: "the social hierarchy, corresponding to capital inherited and economic and political capital

actually held, is in opposition to the specific, properly cultural hierarchy, corresponding to the capital of scientific authority and intellectual renown” (48).

Bourdieu holds that the first of these “becomes increasingly dominant as we ascend [...] the hierarchy extending from the science faculties to the faculties of law or medicine” and that the latter, “which is founded on the autonomy of the scientific and intellectual order” (48), increases in the opposite direction. At this end of the spectrum, individuals tend to display a “rejection of everything which enforces respect for the status quo” (51).

Bourdieu also discusses how the university field reproduces itself. Specific mechanisms ensure the integrity of the institution, including nepotism (56) and “co-optation techniques” that “always aim to select ‘the [successful] man’ , who is envisaged differently according to different practitioners (58).

The powerful supervisor, who monitors the progress of their student, and ensures that their student respects the university field’s “order of succession”, has the power to suspend or license their student’s academic work, career and reputation as a legitimate scholar (84-87). In order for a student to progress within academia and obtain their own academic capital, the student respects the hierarchical order of the university and conforms and adopts the sanctioned properties, or characteristics, of their supervisor and other established academics within their field. The properties that the aspiring academic adopts are summarized by Bourdieu through the concept of *habitus*; “a system of shared social dispositions and cognitive structures which generates perceptions, appreciations and actions” (279). This system, which students and professors maintain by conforming to the established *habitus* and associating academic capital to positions within the university, reinforces the structural power dynamics of the university field (91-95).

These examples of power relations found within the university field are only a portion of the structural patterns presented by the theorist. However, seeking a supervisor and successfully completing academic career criteria, in order to accumulate academic capital and be recognized as a legitimate scholar, is a familiar and accepted process among scholars and should be critically considered. For a reader who has already invested into the academy, and unconsciously, as Bourdieu argues, adopted the *habitus* of the university field, the aforementioned academic career processes clearly explains how power and conformity shape and legitimize an academic’s career and distinguished position within the university (91). Most importantly, this dynamic directly influences the production of knowledge, which is the central concern of Bourdieu’s investigation and attempt to stop scholarly knowledge from being “an instrument of power” (16).

The power structure of the university field and the adoption of the *habitus* of “the academic order which has produced” and legitimized a conforming scholar negatively impacts the production of knowledge (116). The hierarchical power structure of the university field and the temporal qualities of an academic’s career has the potential to impede research, as a scholar must gain academic capital in order to acquire the right to engage in types of research and disseminate data to the academic community (104-105). In addition, the adoption of academic *habitus* diminishes the potential to develop alternative research methods and perspectives, as the scholar is conforming to the properties and standards of already established academics (104). The power dynamics of the university field determine who can be recognized as a legitimate scholar and what constitutes valid research (104-105). Bourdieu’s work reveals that the standards of academic objectivity, which are associated to the scholar and their discourse, is not objective, but subjectively constructed by the mechanisms of power and conformity that exist within the university (29).

Bourdieu does not provide readers with a method of manoeuvring or resolving the power dynamics of the university. However, as Bourdieu aims to “exoticize the domestic”, meaning that the theorist wants academics to critically engage and understand the academic world they currently inhabit, he provides readers with the opportunity to consciously question what motivates their research questions, methods and conclusions (xi).

Bourdieu’s work is an example of academic “intervention” as it encourages scholars to reflect on their current position within the university field and review what processes or standards inform their research (Wacquant 2). Bourdieu’s work has the potential to inspire radical changes regarding academic standards and research. However, academics must honestly reflect on their position of

power, what constitutes the standard for academic research, who can participate in the production of this knowledge and by whom this knowledge is validated.

References:

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